

## **READING THE IRISH LANDSCAPE AND ITS ROLE IN IRELAND'S CULTURAL HERITAGE BIRR, CO. OFFALY, IRELAND**

**Course ID: ARCH 365AQ**

**June 18 – July 01, 2023**

**Academic Credits: 3 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 4.5 Quarter Units)**

**School of Record: Connecticut College**

### **DIRECTORS:**

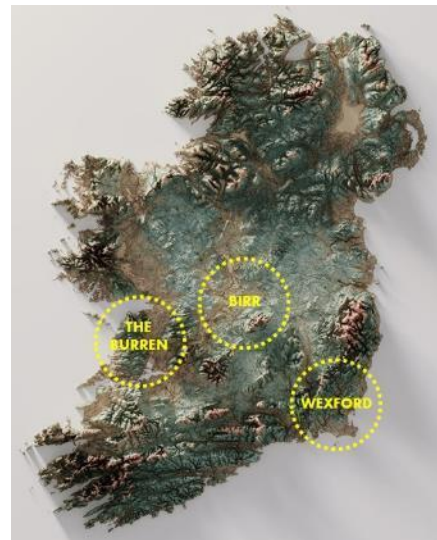
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*'Today Offaly is a sacred landscape, enriched by the folklore, history, poetry, art and architecture of our Christian past. The landscape tells a story not only of our county, but of our nation. How we care for this priceless resource will be our legacy to future generations'*

- Caimin O'Brien



### **INTRODUCTION**

This field and lecture-based field school provides students with an in-depth understanding of how human settlement and cultural heritage is shaped by the natural environment. Students will gain a broad understanding of how a variety of landscapes are formed, impacted, managed and understood through both natural and cultural lenses.

The Program joins the four-week IFR Program *Environment Science In Ireland: The Environmental and Cultural Heritage of the Irish Landscape*, comprising the second and third weeks of that program.

The landscapes for this program are based in the very heart of the Irish Midlands (in the vicinity of Birr Town), providing ready access to an extraordinarily wide range of natural habitats and culturally important archaeological sites. This location acts as a convenient springboard to a variant range of landscapes and study sites further afield.

This field school is holistic in nature, affording students insights into the natural environment: from the bedrock geology that literally forms the foundations for the topography to the glacial and post-glacial geomorphology, ecology, archaeology and traditional and contemporary economy (and indeed mindsets) of the Midlands. Thus, this program is designed to provide a foundation level knowledge to students from diverse disciplines including environmental science, geology, geography, ecology, archaeology, anthropology and other backgrounds.

An important element of this program is the volume of fieldwork and the scale and variety of field trips to different locations. These will provide students an opportunity to experience, appreciate, as well as record (through mapping and survey exercises) and interpret the variation in environments and landscape types within Ireland – and how these influence the country's cultural and natural heritage.

The program provides a practical introduction to all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Irish landscape. It aims to give students a sound introduction into how to relate cultural heritage to the underlying geology as a foundation to the landscape.

As part of the program students will visit the following different locations:

### **BIRR**



Birr will act as the 'base' for the entire program. Birr is a small town (population c. 6000) that nonetheless contains all modern amenities and is well served by public infrastructure. The town is well known as one of Ireland's most important Heritage Towns, with significant early and later medieval archaeology and history, dating from at least Saint Brendan's 6<sup>th</sup> century CE monastery. Today the town is best known for its mid-18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century CE elegant Georgian streetscapes. At the centre of the town is Birr Castle, a 17<sup>th</sup> century CE structure built adjacent to the location of the original 12<sup>th</sup> century CE castle site. The castle remains the home of the Earls of Rosse to this day. The demesne landscape of the castle, which evolved from the oak parkland of the late medieval castle, is one of the finest in Ireland.

A large area of land surrounding Birr (and a large amount of County Offaly in general) is underlain by raised bog, much of which is currently being exploited for fuel and the generation of electricity by Bord na Móna, the state's peat development company. The conservation of the resulting cutaway bog is currently a major exercise in ecological restoration in the region. Approximately 24 km north-east of Birr is one such restoration project - the Lough Boora Parklands, a destination for our fieldwork.

Located directly south of Birr are the Slieve Bloom Mountains, made up of rocks of considerable geological interest, as these mountains represent a highly significant episode in the geological history of Ireland. The rocks that make up the Slieve Blooms date to the Devonian and Silurian periods, 350 to 440 million years ago. At the beginning of that time, the area that is now the north-west of Ireland and the area that is now the south-east of Ireland, were on opposite sides of a shrinking ocean known as the Iapetus Ocean. By about 410 million years ago, these two areas collided, and a great mountain-building phase was in progress. The present-day Slieve Bloom Mountains lie along, or are very close to, the 'Iapetus Suture', the notional line that marks where these two areas with very different early geological histories amalgamated to create the area now known as Ireland. Several of the field trips, and much of the field instruction in recording techniques, will be undertaken to the foothills of these mountain ranges.



### **THE BURREN**



Students will undertake a field trip in the Burren. The Burren is underlain by limestones of the Lower Carboniferous (Visean) period. The limestone formed as sediments in a tropical sea which covered most of Ireland approximately 350 million years ago. The Burren is one of the finest examples of a Glacio-Karst landscape in the world. At least two glacial advances are known in the Burren area. However, it is probably the effects of the last glaciation (the Midlandian) that are most in evidence in this National Park. It is thought that most of the Burren was overrun

by ice during this glaciation. This is evident by the presence of fresh deposits of boulder clay at altitudes of just under 300 metres. Of particular interest is the impact of the first farmers who arrived into this

region on their surroundings, with the removal of tree cover resulting in a dramatic and catastrophic change to the landscape. The Burren is Ireland's most biodiverse area, internationally famed not just for its geology but also for its flora and fauna, and the rich archaeological heritage preserved here. During their stay, students will be introduced to all aspects of the geological and cultural heritage of this unique area. They will also become aware of how agricultural history shaped the geological and cultural character of the Burren as they see today.

### **THE SOUTHEAST – THE DISCOVERING AIDAN'S MONASTERY PROJECT**

The geological landscape of the southeast of Ireland is dramatically different from the Midlands and the Burren. The bedrock was predominantly laid down in the Iapetus Ocean before being uplifted in the Caledonian Orogeny. In 2019 the Discovering Aidan's Monastery archaeological project commenced in the heritage town of Ferns, Co. Wexford. The project aims to assess one of the most historically significant medieval sites in Ireland. The project is centred on a major research excavation of St Aidan's c. 7<sup>th</sup> century monastery and a 12<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian. This site is a multi-period complex, originally founded by St Aidan at the turn of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which also contains Early Medieval crosses and cross slabs, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian Abbey (Mary's Abbey), and 13<sup>th</sup> century medieval cathedral (Edan's Cathedral) within its wider confines. .



### **ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS**

**Credit Units:** Attending students will be awarded 3 semester credit units (equivalent to 4.5 quarter credit units) through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see grading assessment and matrix). This field school provides a minimum of 130 hours of experiential education. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and registrars at their home institution prior to attending this field school.

**Transcripts:** An official copy of transcripts will be mailed to the permanent address listed by students on their online application. One more transcript may be sent to the student's home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the National Student Clearinghouse: <http://bit.ly/2hvurkl>.

### **PREREQUISITES**

There are no academic prerequisites for this field school. What is required is enthusiasm, a sense of excitement and a readiness to give it everything. Students must be willing to engage with the local community, in which they are working and living, in a professional and respectful manner, both during the official work hours and when 'off duty'. A moderate level of fitness is advisable as this program entails a lot of fieldwork and walking.

### **DISCLAIMER – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY**

Our primary concern is with education. Traveling and conducting field research involve risk. Students interested in participating in IFR programs must weigh whether the potential risk is worth the value of education provided. While risk is inherent in everything we do, we do not take risk lightly. The IFR engages in intensive review of each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the IFR reviews each program annually to make sure it complies with all our standards and policies, including student safety.

The IFR does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. We encourage students to explore such insurance on their own as it may be purchased at affordable prices. [Insuremytrip.com](https://insuremytrip.com) or [Travelgurad.com](https://travelgurad.com) are possible sites where field school participants may explore travel cancellation insurance quotes and policies. If you do purchase such insurance, make sure the policy covers the cost of both airfare and tuition.

We do our best to follow schedules and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to change.

You should be aware that conditions in the field are different from those you experience in your home, dorms or college town. Field work, which is so central to the program, involves work outdoors. The Irish weather is very variable, and you should be prepared for field work in all weather conditions – including rain. You are required to bring suitable waterproof clothing and footwear as well as sunscreen. **Students MUST be in good physical condition and able to walk three-five miles (5 – 8 km) a day on rough and hilly ground.**

If you have any medical concerns, please consult your doctor. For all other concerns, please consult the project director, as appropriate.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

On successful completion of the program, students will:

- Have a good base understanding of the merits of taking a holistic, ‘landscape wide’, approach to any form of research inquiry – be that archaeological, cultural ecological etc;
- Be familiar with an outline of the archaeological and cultural heritage of Ireland, and in particular how archaeological heritage is expressed relative to, and influenced by, the underlying geology and topography –i.e. how people and place are co-defined and inscribed in landscape.
- Have a good understanding of the basic elements of Irish solid and glacial geology and how geology as ‘bedrock’ is instrumental in shaping the ecology, society and economy of the Irish Midlands (and other studied landscapes);

## GRADING MATRIX

**Fieldwork Participation (60%):** Students are required to participate fully in the daily schedule. Assessment will be undertaken by the supervisory team and will be based on attendance, willingness to work and to try diverse tasks, attention to detail and accuracy, participation in teamwork and contribution to discussions.

**Field Journal (30%):** Students are expected to maintain a field journal and present it for evaluation during their final week. This notebook should record student’s daily activities, including details on geological mapping exercises, notes on all fieldwork, check-lists of flora and fauna and details of lectures and laboratory exercises, as well as personal observations.

**Ted talk (10%):** At the start of Week 2, students will be required to give a 3-minute presentation on a research topic of their choice, but which must be related to the program. The presentation will be given to the group in the form of a ‘Ted Talk’ and may use powerpoint or other visual aids.

## IFR COVID-19 SAFETY LOGISTICS

An IFR field school is designed to provide positive, constructive experiences for communities, students, and researchers. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, IFR protocols have been developed based on the assumption that any participant in an IFR field school may be an asymptomatic carrier of SARS COVID-19. Our goal, with these protocols, is to reduce the possibility for COVID-19 transmission among participants, staff, and local community members. IFR depends on the complete and sustained commitment of all students to stay healthy and to help others stay healthy. On enrolment, students commit to comply with all aspects of the IFR COVID-19 avoidance policy as well as any/all policies specific to their respective IFR field school.



## **PRIOR TO TRAVEL**

IFR requires all students participating in IFR programs to be “up to date” with their COVID-19 vaccines, meaning they have completed a COVID-19 vaccine primary series AND received the most recent booster dose recommended by CDC, if eligible. For recommendations and eligibility for booster shots according to age and health status, please consult the [CDC website](#).

## **VISA REQUIREMENTS**

Citizens of the US and Canada do not require visas to enter Ireland. You will need your passport to be valid for at least 90 days and will enter on a tourist visa. Citizens of other countries are asked to check the embassy website page at their home country for specific visa requirements

No other vaccinations are required for entry to Ireland but anyone working in archaeology in Ireland needs to have an up-to-date tetanus shot.

## **TRAVEL (TO AND DURING THE PROGRAM)**

We suggest you hold off purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to the departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and various other factors may force the cancelation of a field school. The IFR monitors local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to the beginning of each program and makes a decision accordingly. This approach allows sufficient time to still purchase deeply discounted airline tickets.

Students will be met in Birr, Co. Offaly. Since students will arrive on different flights at different times of the day, we will meet all students Sunday, July 10th, (first day of arrival) at Dooly's Hotel ([doolyshotel.com](#)) at 4pm. Directions and travel information will be issued to all students once they are enrolled in the field school.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email the field school director immediately. A local emergency mobile phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

## **LOCAL PROTOCOLS, REGULATIONS, & EXPECTATIONS**

### **COVID-19 Disclaimer:**

The logistics outlined below for this IFR field school were written according to the most current and accurate information available to IFR. We recognize that the best practices for preventing the transmission of the coronavirus may change in the coming months. The IFR will be revisiting program-specific plans periodically throughout the enrollment period and will update program details according to new developments, new travel protocols, and updates to local policies. Updates to program-specific protocols will be communicated to participants at the pre-program orientation.

An IFR field school is designed to provide safe, positive, and constructive experiences for participating communities, students, and researchers. We are committed to protocols and practices that support the health and well-being of all involved in our field school projects, including the members of the community in which these projects take place. The IFR COVID-19 Policies have been developed with Dr. Kurt Eifling, the IFR Medical Director. Dr Eifling is a Fellow of the Academy of Wilderness Medicine and a practicing physician (<https://ifrglobal.org/about/staff/>).

We strongly recommend reviewing IFR's COVID-19 policies before enrolling in a program. All IFR students sign an agreement (Student COVID-19 Prevention Agreement) to uphold and abide by all aspects of the IFR COVID-19 policy as published on the website (<https://ifrglobal.org/ifr-covid-19-practices/>) as well as any program-specific protocols. These practices are subject to change as health and risk management experts provide new recommendations and best practices.

In Ireland we follow the government guidelines and restrictions, which are published on the Health Service Executive (our equivalent of the CDC), which has a designated webpage for COVID-19 restrictions, information and advice (see <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>). The COVID-19 Safe Operating Procedures (SOP) of the Irish Archaeology Field School are also currently available on the IFR's website and will be updated prior to the start of the field season, based on the current advice in Ireland at that time. These policies, and those of the IFR, will be explained in full to you in your onsite orientation.

Birr is a quintessentially classic, small, friendly and safe Irish town, [some 130km] west of Dublin. All the relevant local government agencies are aware of the students' presence, and they and all the people of the town are anxious to ensure that your stay is safe and enjoyable. Students are asked to respect local sensitivities and traditions and to understand that the presence of such a large team of outsiders in town does not entitle participants to any special treatment or privileges.

Although everyone will speak English, students should expect surprising cultural differences and exciting opportunities to learn about the lives of others as well. IFR students will be immersed in Irish culture through learning, language, food and music, and should be prepared for the rewards and challenges that life in a different culture will offer.

## ACCOMMODATION



With the exception of the extended field trips in the Burren, the students will be housed in Home Stay accommodation in the town of Birr, Co. Offaly (see schedule). Home Stay students live with local families, and experience true home life in provincial Ireland. Students are to keep the accommodation clean and tidy at all times and to be respectful towards their HomeStay family and roommates. Students will walk (or be dropped to and collected from) a designated meeting point (normally Birr Square or Birr Community School). Breakfast and dinner will be provided along with a packed lunch. At weekends students are encouraged to avail of their free time and explore Ireland. Food will be provided during extended field trips.

In the Burren accommodation will be in (single sex) shared dormitory style rooms in local hostels, with meals provided in a communal setting.

Homestay accommodation is an integral and critical part of our Covid-19 planning as typically, our students stay with local families.

It is possible but unlikely that the programs will go ahead but that we will use alternate accommodation (e.g. hostels / holiday cottages), but it is hoped that the students will continue to avail of homestay accommodation, as it is an important component of the cultural immersion our programs provide.

Students and staff will be able to isolate themselves within their homestay accommodation, in line with our government health advice. For example, a suspected (or confirmed) case must isolate themselves in their own room and have access to their own bathroom.

All participants in a field school, students and staff, will wear masks while indoors (i.e. during lectures, during labs, in shared residential spaces, etc.).

Regular hand washing will be a part of the project's daily schedule.

## EQUIPMENT LIST

Bring a basic travel/fieldwork kit, which is to include but not necessarily be limited to:

- Clothing suitable for wet and cool (as well as warm!) weather.
- Hiking-style waterproof shoes or boots.
- Sunscreen: when in the field students should wear an SPF daily to protect against UV exposure and windburn. Despite its relatively cool summer temperatures, Ireland has high UV in the summer months.
- A peaked or wide-brimmed sun hat for outdoors.
- Insect repellent (essential for periods of fieldwork).
- Laptop/tablet: a device on which you can prepare and submit your presentation and written assignments.
- Writing materials, including a strong field notebook.
- All participants in a field school, students and staff, will wear masks while indoors (i.e. during lectures, during labs, in shared residential spaces, etc.).

## PROGRAM SCHEDULE

All IFR field schools begin with safety orientation. This orientation includes proper behavior at the field area, proper clothing, local cultural sensitivities and sensibilities, potential fauna and flora hazards, review IFR harassment and discrimination policies and review of the student Code of Conduct.

### WEEK 1

During the first week, students will come to understand the geology and ecology of the Midland region. Emphasis will be placed on the examination in the field of geological and glacial landforms, flora and microfauna. Laboratory work will comprise microscopic examination of plants, on floral evolution and the interaction between plants and their pollinators.

## WEEK 2

During Week 2 the students will spend three days in the Burren, County Clare. The Burren is Ireland's most biodiverse area, internationally famed for its karst geology and the rich archaeological heritage preserved here. During their stay the students will be introduced to all aspects of the natural and cultural heritage of this unique area – specifically how the two interplay. They will also become aware of how agricultural history has shaped the natural and cultural character of the Burren, and how modern agricultural practice works to conserve and enhance that threatened heritage. Students will also visit the Curragh, CO. Kildare, Ireland's oldest pristine grassland, to

At the end of Week 2, students will present their Ted Talks on their chosen research topics.

### DAILY SCHEDULE \*

Unless stated otherwise in the detailed schedule below, students will be committed to program activities from Monday to Friday inclusive, attending lectures and field visits. The normal working day is from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm with a morning tea break from 11:00 to 11:30 am and lunch from 1:30 to 2:15 pm – variations to the schedule will exist during field trips. In preparation for their field visits, students will be introduced to the different areas of the country through a series of lectures (as outlined in the schedule below). Students will have the weekend free to explore the area and other parts of the country.

|               |           | MORNING  | AFTERNOON   |
|---------------|-----------|--|---|
| <b>WEEK 1</b> |           |  |   |
| 18-Jun-23     | Sunday    |  | Welcome & orientation   |
| 19-Jun-23     | Monday    | Lectures: Geology of the Midlands in relation to the world at large (with particular reference to the United States) | Fieldwork: Visit to Glenbarrow and its environs for a geological field trip, including geological/geographic mapping and interpretation |
| 20-Jun-23     | Tuesday   | Lecture: Bogs in Ireland, their formation, exploitation and restoration  | Fieldwork: Study in the Bog of Galros, interpreting the influence of geology and landscape on archaeology, history etc.                 |
| 21-Jun-23     | Wednesday | Lecture: The flora of central Ireland; floral biology  | Fieldwork: Lough Boora Flora study & collection of material for microscope work; Laboratory work: Working with plant materials          |
| 22-Jun-23     | Thursday  | Lecture: Aquatic invertebrates and biological sampling   | Fieldwork: Invertebrate sampling in Midland rivers; Laboratory work: Working with aquatic invertebrate samples                          |
| 23-Jun-23     | Friday    | Laboratory work: Working with plant materials  | Laboratory work: Working with aquatic invertebrate samples  |
| 24-Jun-23     | Saturday  | Free day   |   |
| 25-Jun-23     | Sunday    | Free day   |   |

|               |           |  |  |
|---------------|-----------|--|--|
| <b>WEEK 2</b> |           |  |  |
| 26-Jun-23     | Monday    | Fieldwork: Travel to the Burren National Park at Carran.   | Fieldwork: Tour to significant medieval (Cathair Mór) and Neolithic (Poulnabrone) archaeological sites; visit to the Cliffs of Moher |
| 27-Jun-23     | Tuesday   | Fieldwork: Trip investigating the Prehistory and the Early Christian period on the Termon Plateau  |  |
| 28-Jun-23     | Wednesday | Ted Talks  | Travel to Birr   |
| 29-Jun-23     | Thursday  | Lecture: Environmental Impact Assessment (Cultural Heritage)   | Workshop: Cultural Heritage Assessment of local landscape  |
| 30-Jun-23     | Friday    | Fieldwork: Trip to Wexford to visit the Carrick Project and interpret the geological and archaeological landscapes of the southeast of Ireland |  |
| 01-Jul-23     | Saturday  | Depart program   |  |

*\*Please note: amendments to this schedule may be made to take account of weather conditions or urgent unforeseen circumstances.*



## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

*PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.*

### **Recommended Reading**

David, Bruno and Julian Thomas (2008). *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology*. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press. Chapters 1, 2 and 4.

Jones, Carleton (2004). *The Burren and the Aran Islands. Exploring the Archaeology*. Cork, The Collins Press.

O' Brien, C. 2006. *Stories from a Sacred Landscape: Croghan Hill to Clonmacnoise*. Mercier Press. Cork

Viney, Michael (2003). *Ireland. A Smithsonian Natural History*. Belfast, The Blackstaff Press: Chapters 1-8, 12 and 17.

### **Recommended Further Reading/Field Reference Guides**

D'Arcy, Gordon (1992). *The Natural History of the Burren*. London, Immel.

Feehan, John (2003). *Farming in Ireland: History, Heritage and Environment*. University College Dublin Faculty of Agriculture.

Feehan, John (2004). *A Long-Lived Wilderness. The Future of the North Midland Peatlands*. ERM in collaboration with the National Wetlands Park Committee.

Feehan, John (2007). *Cuirrech Lifè. The Curragh of Kildare, Ireland*. School of Biology and Environmental Science UCD in association with the Department of Defence.

Feehan, John (2013). *The Geology of Laois and Offaly*. Offaly County Council, in association with Laois County Council and the Geological Survey of Ireland.

Feehan, John (2014). *Cluain Mac Nóis i nDeilbne hEthra: The Landscape of Clonmacnoise, County Offaly, Ireland*. Offaly County Council in association with Bord na Móna.

Feehan, John (2016). *The Carran and Templecronan Looped Walks*. Clare's Rock Hostel, Carran.

Feehan, John and Alison Rosse (2005). *An Atlas of Birr*. Department of Environmental Resource Management at University College Dublin in association with Offaly County Council.

Feehan, John (1979). *The Landscape of Slieve Bloom: a study of its natural and human heritage*. Blackwater Press, Dublin (revised edition 2009).

O'Connell, Jeff W. and Anne Korff (eds.) (2001). *The Book of the Burren*. Kinvara, TirEolas (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

Viney, Michael (2003). *Ireland. A Smithsonian Natural History*. Belfast, The Blackstaff Press.